TC1485-18

ASIA WATCH

739 Eighth Street SE, Washington DC 20003
(202) 546-9336

ADRIAN DEWIND
Chairman
■
ARYEH NEIER
Vice Chairman
■
ERIC SCHWARTZ
Program Director
■
HOLLY BURKHALTER
Washington Representative
■
SUSAN OSNOS
Press Director

TESTIMONY OF ERIC SCHWARTZ ON BEHALF OF THE ASIA WATCH COMMITTEE

AUGUST 13, 1987

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION

I testify today on behalf of the Asia Watch Committee, which was established by the Fund for Free Expression in 1985 to monitor and promote internationally recognized human rights in Asia. Asia Watch is affiliated with the Americas Watch and Helsinki Watch Committees. We now monitor respect for internationally recognized human rights in about ten Asian countries of varying ideologies, including Indonesia and East Timor.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to take this opportunity to restate, and thereby emphasize the importance of the following basic concerns. First, we believe that continuing conflict in East Timor and various restrictions on persons in the territory have had severe consequences for the civilian population. Secondly, lack of access and scutiny has encouraged abuses against suspected sympathizers and supporters of Timorese independence.

ASIA WATCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

■ Floyd Abrams ■ Edward J. Baker ■ Robert L. Bernstein ■ Tom A. Bernstein ■ Dolores A. Donovan ■ Adrienne Germain ■ Deborah M. Greenberg ■ Jack Greenberg ■ David Hawk ■ Liang Heng ■ Jeri Laber ■ Virginia Leary ■ Amit Pandya ■ Dith Pran ■ Sheila Rothman ■ Barnett Rubin ■ Orville H. Schell ■ James Scott ■ Judith Shapiro ■ Sophie C. Silberberg

The Fund for Free Expression is the parent organization of the Americas Watch, Helsinki Watch and Asia Watch

Thirdly, and in light of this situation, the absence of reasonable access to the territory for human rights and humanitarian organizations should be a matter of utmost concern to the international community. And finally, continued international concern about conditions in East Timor -- reflected in part by the proceedings of this Committee -- is essential if the international community hopes to discourage continued abuses of human rights and humanitarian law.

Continuing conflict in East Timor is far more widespread than is acknowledged by Indonesian authorities. We believe that roughly two-thirds of the territory is subject to varying degrees of conflict, and is considered less than secure from the Indonesian government's perspective. Under these circumstances, access by international humanitarian agencies to these areas of conflict is essential. Unfortunately, such access, at present, is limited or non-existent.

Asia Watch is not alone in voicing concern over the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and lack of access to East Timor. In recent days a bipartisan group of 40 United States Senators has written to U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz emphasizing concern over accounts of "a renewed military offensive" against Timorese resistance. An August 9, 1987 New York Times article describing this initiative is attached to my testimony for your information.

The letter, which was signed by forty percent of the members of the U.S. Senate, was initiated by Senator David Durenberger, a Republican from Minnesota, and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a Democrat from New York. Senator Moynihan also served as United

States Ambassador to the United Nations at the time of Indonesia's 1975 invasion of East Timor.

Speaking of the renewed Indonesian military offensive, the 40 Senators said:

> In the past, such offensives have been characterized by grave human rights violations against the population of the territory, including summary executions, forced marches, relocation, torture, political imprisonment -- in addition to food shortages and disease. Because of this history, which includes a catastrophic famine in East Timor from 1978-80, we believe that reports of significant new Indonesian military operations in the territory warrant the concern of the United States Congress and the Administration.
>
> We believe that at the very least, international humanitarian organizations should have full access to East Timor so as to ensure the maximum degree of relief and protection to the civilian population and political detainees alike. While we understand that certain aspects of the East Timor situation have improved in recent years, we would like to ensure conditions do no deteriorate as a result of an increased level of Indonesian military activity.

At this point, Asia Watch would like to reiterate some of our specific concerns that arise from the conflict in East Timor. We refer to our statement to the Special Committee in 1986, which is relevant to the current situation:

> Reports [Asia Watch] has received indicate an exceptionally high mortality rate among children between the ages of one and five in the Baucau region of East Timor. And according to our information, this problem is not limited to the Baucau region. We appeal both to the government and to responsible international organizations to facilitate the proper nutritional and medical care for people in need as quickly as possible. We also urge the Indonesian government to grant full access for agencies seeking to address these problems.

To its credit, the Indonesian government subsequently addressed some, but not all of the concerns that we expressed last year with regard to certain food and medical problems.

However, recently received reports suggest that concerned observers may have underestimated the extent and complexity of humanitarian problems in the territory, which have continued. Information Asia Watch has obtained points to severe problems of malnutrition and disease amongst the Timorese population in the strife-ridden eastern and central regions of East Timor and other areas of military conflict. Exacerbating these problems is the Indonesian policy of restricting the movement of Timorese farmers and others, thereby making normal crop production -- let alone anything approaching prosperity and well-being -- impossible. Moreover, there are persistent accounts of an Indonesian policy of transmigration of Indonesian settlers to East Timor, a policy that is reliably reported to have resulted in the monopolization of much of East Timor's most fertile land by these transmigrants. (We also note that the international legal status of East Timor raises the most serious questions about the legality of the policy of transmigration.) Again, under these circumstances, international humanitarian access to areas of need is essential. The Special Committee as well as concerned governments should urge the Indonesian government to permit such access for a wide range of international humanitarian organizations, only some of which have thus far gained even limited access to East Timor.

Asia Watch believes that the nutritional and medical problems of the East Timorese population should be speedily addressed, and appeals to all parties of good will to facilitate entry of international humanitarian agencies into each and every affected area of East Timor.

Asia Watch is also concerned about continued reports of arbitrary arrest, mistreatment, and unfair trials of political prisoners suspected of supporting independence for East Timor. Since late 1983, more than 200 such persons have been tried and convicted. As we mentioned in our statement last year, it is remarkable that all the defendants were reported to have pleaded guilty and none have appealed their convictions. Under these circumstances, we again urge the Special Committee to do all within its power to encourage the Indonesian government to permit trial observation in East Timor.

In addition, we remain deeply concerned about the health and well-being of East Timorese detainees as well as those who have been released from the Atauro detention center and other such facilities. Asia Watch once again appeals to the Special Committee to urge the Indonesian government to ensure appropriate medical and nutritional care for all East Timorese detainees. Asia Watch also appeals to the Special Committee to take similar action in the cases of detainees who have been released from Atauro Island. Large numbers of these detainees have been prevented from returning to their home villages. In the past, such persons fell victim to starvation and disease. Barring full access to all areas of East Timor, there are no guarantees that such conditions are, in all cases, a thing of the past.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that the Asia Watch Committee has been prepared to visit East Timor for the past two years, but has been denied permission by the Indonesian government. As we have stated, the Indonesian government believes that human rights reporting on East Timor is biased and

untruthful. We can only reiterate our position in this respect: if the Indonesian government truly wishes to set the record straight, it should allow the world community to view conditions in East Timor first-hand. The problem -- and a possible solution -- is best summed up by Senators Durenberger, Moynihan and their 38 colleagues:

> As some of us have noted in the past, information on conditions in East Timor is limited, owing to Jakarta's policy of restricting access to the territory as well as official controls and the atmosphere of fear that has confronted many of those who have made visits. We believe that the situation in East Timor can only be clarified if Jakarta were to permit regular missions to the territory by respected international human rights organizations.

In the words of Senator Durenberger, in a statement issued on August 9:

> When a situation is out of the public eye, that is when the worse kind of abuses occur. The citizens of East Timor deserve the same basic human rights our nation advocates to the world, even if their situation is less known. I want to make it clear that their plight is not, and will not be, forgotten. The fact that 39 of my colleagues have signed this letter indicates that the United States Senate will not turn their eyes from the tragedy of East Timor.

In this respect, Mr. Chairman, Asia Watch would like to commend the Special Committee for its continued concern for the inhabitants of East Timor, and strongly urge continued efforts to monitor human rights and humanitarian conditions and to ensure increased access to the territory.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY AUGUST 9, 1987.

40 Senators Voice Concern for Timor Fighting

By RICHARD HALLORAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8 — A bipartisan group of 40 senators has written to Secretary of State George P. Shultz about what they called "a renewed Indonesian military offensive against Timorese insurgents."

It was unusual for that many senators, led by Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, to express concern for a situation that draws little public attention.

Mr. Durenberger said in a statement that "by sending this letter, my colleagues and I want to insure that East Timor receives international attention that will help to alleviate the tragic suffering of the Timorese people."

Timor is an island at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago. During the colonial era, it was under Dutch rule in the west and Portuguese rule in the east. Indonesia inherited the Dutch portion when it gained independence and invaded East Timor in 1975.

Since then, according to repeated reports by Roman Catholic and humanitarian organizations, the Indonesians have sought, often with military force, to subdue East Timorese nationalist insurgents, many of whom are Catholics. Indonesian is largely Moslem.

The statement by Mr. Durenberger said "international human-rights organizations and church bodies estimate that 150,000 East Timorese, one fifth of the island country's population, have perished from warfare and famine over the past 12 years."

In their letter the senators urged that "at the very least, international humanitarian organizations should have full access to East Timor so as to insure the maximum degree of relief and protection to the civilian population and political detainees alike."

The senators made three specific points:

¶"We have received reports that Indonesia's World Bank-funded population control program in East Timor is coercive in some instances. There have been accounts of involuntary sterilizations in some instances."

¶"We are concerned about the situation of individuals seeking to leave East Timor to join family members in Portugal who have thus far not been allowed to do so."

¶"We are also particularly interested in the cases of four East Timorese students in Jakarta who wish to leave Indonesia but have thus far been denied exit visas by the Indonesian authorities."

Although noting that some aspects of the situation in East Timor had improved, the senators said that "we would like to insure conditions do not deteriorate as a result of an increased level of Indonesian military activity."